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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000059

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

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SUBJECT: Dispute Process Extended; Mambe Weakened by Dissent within
CEI

REF: 10 ABIDJAN 15

CLASSIFIED BY: Tanya Salseth, Political Officer, Department of State,
Embassy Abidjan; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (U) Summary: After weeks of speculation, the Prime Minister's Office and the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) announced on February 2 that the period for filing challenges to the provisional electoral list will be reopened from February 4 through 14. The day after the announcement, 10 of the 31 central CEI commissioners signed a declaration stating they would "abstain" from fulfilling their duties during the reopened process and would refuse to cooperate with the prime minister's observation committees. The ongoing fraud "scandal" has eroded Mambe's authority and various commissioners are acting independently, creating increasing confusion. Meanwhile, a series of disturbing incidents, including protests in Divo, Katiola, and Man, and a break-in into a CEI office in Abidjan, signal a general sense of uneasiness about the latest glitches in the electoral process.
End Summary

DISPUTE PROCESS RE-OPENED, BUT COMMISSIONERS WON'T WORK

12. (C) The dispute process, which officially came to an end on January 9, will be reopened from February 4 through 14, according to a February 2 CEI announcement. Ten central CEI commissioners (most of whom are thought to be pro-FPI) reacted to this news by issuing a joint declaration on February 3, stating they would not assist with the dispute process, nor cooperate with the observation committees set up by the Prime Minister's office (ref A). The commissioners cited "increasing administrative and procedural anomalies" on the part of CEI President Mambe as the reason for their decision, and stated that they would "abstain" from working until the fraud charges are resolved. Alain Dogou, one of the CEI's four vice-presidents and President Gbagbo's representative at the CEI, told Emboffs on February 5 that Mambe has lost support among the commissioners, as many continue to question what role he played in the scandal. Dogou said this loss of confidence has weakened the leadership of the CEI, citing the example of one central commissioner who, without Mambe's permission, asked all of the regional CEI commissioners reporting him to close their offices following the February 3 declaration.

DISTURBING INCIDENTS MULTIPLY

13. (SBU) While the CEI is wracked by internal divisions, disturbances in the electoral landscape seem to be on the rise. Demonstrators in Divo, a southern city not far from Abidjan which saw considerable electoral violence during the 2000 elections, clashed with police on February 1. The incident began after police arrested and detained three people whom members of the ruling FPI party claimed were foreigners who were fraudulently registered on the provisional electoral list. Two police officers were injured

in the clash; seven demonstrators suffered bullet wounds.

14. On February 2, the town hall responsible for administrative documents in the northern city of Katiola repeatedly refused authorized requests to examine the town's birth registry in an attempt to verify the nationality of some petitioners who were accused of being foreign. As a result, youth from the opposition RHDP coalition protested, destroying property in the process. That same day, newspapers reported that three opposition RDR members working at a CEI in the Attecoube neighborhood of Abidjan broke into the CEI office and took 19 boxes of petitioner cases under dispute. The RDR members claimed the break-in was necessary because the head of the office, an FPI partisan, had refused to transfer the documents to the observation committees in compliance with the prime minister's instructions.

On February 5, the embassy received an unconfirmed report from an NGO that pro-ruling party demonstrators are protesting in the western city of Man and are blocking CEI operations from taking place.

15. (C) Comment: This latest declaration by the ten CEI commissioners is disturbing on several levels. Although it is no secret that the president's camp was against the CEI's creation from its inception (the majority of the commissioners are

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affiliated with the opposition, including CEI President Mambe), this marks the first time the organization's integrity is being attacked from within. With Mambe's authority and position in question, individual CEI commissioners, at both the national and regional levels, are now deciding on an individual basis whether or not they will implement the prime minister's directive to transfer disputed cases to the observation committees for a decision. The end result is that some CEI offices untouched by the scandal have continued working, while others have stopped work completely or have been prevented from working by protestors. End Comment.
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